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## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INDIA AND NIGERIA'S FOREIGN POLICIES: CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

By

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**Abstract:** India and Nigeria, two prominent developing nations, exhibit both similarities and differences in their foreign policy approaches. While both prioritize economic diplomacy, South-South Cooperation, and regional leadership, their strategic orientations diverge in multilateral engagements and global alliances. This study explores these convergences and divergences by examining the historical foundations, guiding principles, and strategic interests that shape their foreign policies.

The research is anchored in the Realist and Constructivist theories, which provide a framework for understanding how domestic and international factors influence foreign policy decisions. Through a comparative analysis, the study assesses the extent to which both nations leverage diplomatic engagements to advance their economic and political influence.

The findings reveal that India's foreign policy is largely driven by its global aspirations, positioning itself as an emerging power with strategic alliances beyond its immediate region. In contrast, Nigeria remains more regionally focused, prioritizing leadership within Africa while maintaining key international partnerships. Despite these differences, both countries utilize diplomacy as a tool for economic growth and political relevance.

This study highlights the importance of adaptive foreign policy strategies for developing nations navigating a dynamic global landscape. It recommends that Nigeria adopt a more proactive global stance while maintaining its regional leadership, and India enhance its engagement with Africa to foster mutually beneficial cooperation. Strengthening economic and diplomatic ties between the two nations could also serve as a model for South-South partnerships in the evolving global order.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Economic Diplomacy, Multilateralism

### INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is a crucial aspect of a nation's international engagement, shaped by historical experiences, economic interests, and geopolitical realities. It serves as the guiding framework through which a state navigates its interactions with other nations, international organizations,

and non-state actors. Foreign policy decisions are influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, including historical legacies, domestic political structures, economic capacities, security imperatives, and the international balance of power<sup>1</sup>. These policies determine how a nation

asserts its sovereignty, protects its national interests, and fosters diplomatic relations in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

India and Nigeria, both former British colonies, have pursued dynamic foreign policies to advance their national interests since gaining independence in 1947 and 1960, respectively<sup>2</sup>. The colonial past of these two nations played a significant role in shaping their early diplomatic strategies. Upon gaining independence, both countries prioritized policies that aimed to establish their sovereignty, protect their economic interests, and define their roles within the international community. However, the trajectories of their foreign policy engagements have been influenced by distinct political, economic, and geographical realities.

India has emerged as a key global player, leveraging its economic growth, military capabilities, and strategic geopolitical positioning to exert influence on the world stage. Its foreign policy has evolved from a non-alignment stance during the Cold War to a more assertive and pragmatic global engagement strategy in recent decades. India's growing role in international trade, security partnerships, and multilateral organizations reflects its aspiration to be recognized as a major power. As one of the fastest-growing economies, India has cultivated strong relationships with global powers such as the United States, China, and Russia while also deepening ties with developing nations through initiatives like South-South cooperation. Additionally, its nuclear capabilities, space exploration advancements, and leadership in technology-driven industries contribute to its increasing global relevance<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, Nigeria has established itself as a dominant regional power in Africa, playing a central role in continental affairs and international diplomacy. Its foreign policy has been largely shaped by its economic dependence on oil exports, its commitment to Pan-Africanism, and its strategic involvement in regional peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Nigeria's leadership in African multilateral organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),

underscores its commitment to regional stability and economic integration. While Nigeria has sought to expand its international partnerships beyond Africa, its foreign policy remains deeply rooted in the principles of Afrocentric diplomacy, prioritizing Africa's collective development and self-determination.

This study aims to compare India and Nigeria's foreign policy approaches by examining their strategic priorities, diplomatic engagements, and areas of convergence and divergence. By analyzing these aspects, the study seeks to highlight the similarities and differences in the foreign policy strategies of these two influential nations. Understanding their approaches provides insight into the broader dynamics of international relations in both the South Asian and African contexts.

The paper is structured into conceptual clarifications, theoretical frameworks, and an analysis of key foreign policy trends in both countries. Conceptual clarifications will define key terms and principles that shape foreign policy decision-making. The theoretical framework will examine the dominant international relations theories that explain the motivations and actions of both India and Nigeria in the global arena. Lastly, the analysis of key foreign policy trends will explore their diplomatic strategies, economic engagements, security policies, and multilateral commitments, shedding light on the broader implications of their international relations strategies.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to a state's strategy in managing its interactions with other nations and international organizations<sup>4</sup>. It serves as a crucial tool through which countries assert their sovereignty, protect their national interests, and engage in global affairs. Foreign policy encompasses a wide range of activities, including diplomatic relations, trade policies, military alliances, and international negotiations. It is influenced by internal factors such as political leadership, economic strength, and national security priorities, as well as external factors like

geopolitical dynamics, global power structures, and international law.

In the modern world, foreign policy is shaped by both traditional concerns—such as defense and territorial integrity—and contemporary challenges, including climate change, terrorism, cyber security, and global health crises. As global interdependence increases, countries must balance national interests with international cooperation. Foreign policy strategies vary from nation to nation based on historical experiences, economic capabilities, regional positioning, and ideological orientations.

Both India and Nigeria have developed distinctive foreign policy frameworks aimed at securing their national interests and expanding their influence in global affairs. India, with its economic and military growth, has pursued a pragmatic and multifaceted foreign policy, engaging with global and regional powers to enhance its strategic autonomy<sup>5</sup>. Nigeria, on the other hand, has focused on African diplomacy, peacekeeping, and economic partnerships to consolidate its role as a regional leader in Africa<sup>5</sup>. Despite their different geopolitical realities, both countries utilize economic diplomacy and multilateral engagement as key instruments of their foreign policies<sup>5</sup>.

## **Economic Diplomacy**

Economic diplomacy involves the use of economic tools, such as trade agreements, investments, and foreign aid, to achieve foreign policy objectives<sup>6</sup>. In the globalized economy, nations leverage economic instruments to strengthen diplomatic ties, promote national interests, and enhance their economic influence on the world stage. Trade policies, financial assistance, and strategic investments are key mechanisms through which countries engage in economic diplomacy.

India and Nigeria both emphasize economic diplomacy in their external engagements, though with differing approaches. India has positioned itself as a global economic powerhouse by fostering trade partnerships, engaging in technology-driven economic policies, and

participating in global economic governance institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the G20 and through initiatives such as the "Made in India" program and the India-Africa Forum Summit, India has expanded its economic influence, particularly in Africa and Asia<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, India's strategic partnerships with major economies, such as the United States, China, and the European Union, reflect its commitment to advancing its economic interests on a global scale.

Nigeria, as perceived to be Africa's largest economy, employs economic diplomacy to secure foreign investments, promote regional trade, and enhance economic cooperation. With its vast oil and gas resources, Nigeria has used its energy sector as a diplomatic tool to build strategic alliances with global powers, particularly China, the United States, and European nations. Additionally, Nigeria plays a key role in regional economic integration through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which aims to boost intra-African trade and attract foreign direct investments. Despite economic challenges, including fluctuating oil prices and governance issues, Nigeria continues to pursue economic diplomacy as a means of strengthening its international standing and fostering economic growth.

## **Multilateralism**

Multilateralism is the practice of engaging with multiple countries and international organizations to address global challenges<sup>8</sup>. In an increasingly interconnected world, multilateral cooperation is essential for tackling issues such as security threats, economic instability, climate change, and global pandemics. Multilateralism enables states to amplify their influence, participate in global decision-making, and shape international norms and policies.

India actively participates in multilateral institutions like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the G20, where it contributes to global economic governance, climate initiatives, and development programs and as a rising global power, India has sought to strengthen its position in international



organizations, advocating for reforms in institutions like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to reflect contemporary global realities<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, India is a key player in South-South cooperation, supporting initiatives that promote economic development and technological advancements in developing nations.

Nigeria, on the other hand, focuses on regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), where it plays a leading role in regional security, economic integration, and peacekeeping efforts. Nigeria has been instrumental in mediating conflicts within West Africa and supporting democratic transitions in neighboring states<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, Nigeria actively engages with global institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, advocating for policies that support Africa's economic and political development.

Both India and Nigeria recognize the importance of multilateralism in advancing their foreign policy objectives. While India engages with global economic and strategic alliances, Nigeria focuses on regional stability and African solidarity<sup>9</sup>. Their participation in multilateral institutions reflects their respective geopolitical ambitions and their commitment to fostering global and regional cooperation.

## Theoretical Framework

Foreign policy analysis is often guided by various theoretical perspectives that help explain how states interact in the international system. Theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for understanding the motivations behind foreign policy decisions and the strategies states adopt in their international engagements. Among the most relevant theories in analyzing the foreign policies of India and Nigeria are the Realist Theory and the Constructivist Theory. These theories offer distinct yet complementary insights into the foreign policy orientations of both countries.

### Realist Theory

The Realist theory posits that states act in their self-interest, prioritizing power and security in an

anarchic international system<sup>10</sup>. Realism is one of the oldest and most influential theories in international relations, emphasizing the competitive and conflict-prone nature of global politics. According to realism, states are the primary actors in international affairs, and their actions are driven by the pursuit of power and survival in an environment where no central authority enforces order.

India's foreign policy reflects realism through its pursuit of strategic partnerships and defense alliances. As a rising global power, India has sought to enhance its military capabilities, secure its borders, and engage in strategic alliances that bolster its national security interests and its growing defense ties with the United States, its participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) alongside the US, Japan, and Australia, and its focus on nuclear deterrence highlight its realist approach to foreign policy and Additionally, India has strengthened its defense relations with Russia through arms purchases and military cooperation, ensuring a diversified and pragmatic security strategy<sup>11</sup>.

Beyond military considerations, India's economic diplomacy also aligns with realism. Recognizing the strategic importance of trade and investment, India has pursued economic agreements that enhance its global standing while protecting its economic interests. The country's participation in multilateral economic organizations such as the G20 and the World Trade Organization (WTO) reflects its realist commitment to securing economic advantages in a competitive global environment.

Nigeria's approach to foreign policy also demonstrates realism, particularly in its focus on regional dominance and energy diplomacy. As Africa's largest economy and most populous nation, Nigeria has consistently positioned itself as a regional power within West Africa and the broader African continent. Through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria has played a leading role in mediating conflicts, deploying peacekeeping forces, and influencing regional security dynamics.

Nigeria's foreign policy is also driven by economic realism, particularly in its management of energy resources. As one of the world's largest oil producers, Nigeria has leveraged its oil wealth to strengthen diplomatic ties with major global powers, including the United States, China, and European nations. Its participation in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a key aspect of its realist foreign policy, allowing Nigeria to exert influence over global oil markets and negotiate favorable economic arrangements.

Both India and Nigeria's foreign policies align with realism by emphasizing strategic interests, military security, and economic influence. While India's realism is reflected in its global strategic engagements and military modernization, Nigeria's realism is evident in its regional leadership and resource-driven diplomacy.

## Constructivist Theory

Constructivism argues that foreign policy is shaped by historical experiences, identity, and normative values unlike realism, which focuses on material power and security, constructivism emphasizes the role of ideas, beliefs, and social interactions in shaping international relations<sup>12</sup>. Constructivists argue that states do not merely act based on material capabilities but are also influenced by historical narratives, cultural identities, and ideological commitments.

India's non-alignment policy is a key example of constructivism in its foreign policy behavior and rooted in India's historical experience of colonialism and its desire to maintain strategic autonomy, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) emerged as a defining feature of India's international relations during the Cold War in that the policy was not merely a strategic choice but a reflection of India's ideological commitment to sovereignty, anti-colonialism, and peaceful coexistence<sup>13</sup>. Even as India has moved towards more pragmatic international engagements in the 21st century, elements of its non-alignment legacy continue to influence its foreign policy decisions. India's emphasis on South-South cooperation, its leadership in global development initiatives, and

its advocacy for a more inclusive international order all reflect constructivist principles.

Similarly, Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomacy illustrates how historical and ideological factors influence state behavior. Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has consistently framed its foreign policy around the principle of Pan-Africanism. This commitment to African solidarity is rooted in Nigeria's historical identity as a leading post-colonial state and its belief in the collective advancement of the continent. Nigeria's active role in the African Union (AU), its support for liberation movements during the apartheid era, and its leadership in regional peacekeeping missions all demonstrate its constructivist approach to foreign policy.

Moreover, Nigeria's foreign policy often incorporates cultural diplomacy, using shared African heritage and identity to strengthen ties with other nations<sup>13</sup>. This is evident in Nigeria's promotion of African unity through institutions like ECOWAS and its emphasis on mutual cooperation among African states.

While realism explains the power-driven aspects of India and Nigeria's foreign policies, constructivism provides insight into their ideologically motivated diplomatic actions. India's historical experience with colonialism and its commitment to strategic autonomy have shaped its foreign policy outlook, while Nigeria's identity as a Pan-African leader has influenced its engagement with other African nations. Together, these theories help explain the complex motivations behind the foreign policies of both countries.

## India and Nigeria's Foreign Policy Approaches:

The foreign policy approaches of India and Nigeria exhibit both convergences and divergences, shaped by their historical experiences, economic aspirations, and geopolitical realities. The theoretical frameworks of Realism and Constructivism provide insightful lenses for analyzing these dynamics. Realism explains how both countries pursue their national interests through power consolidation, economic

diplomacy, and strategic alliances, while Constructivism highlights the role of historical narratives, identity, and ideological commitments in shaping their foreign policy decisions.

## **Convergences in Foreign Policy:**

### **South-South Cooperation**

Both India and Nigeria emphasize South-South Cooperation (SSC) as a means of fostering economic and political solidarity among developing nations<sup>14</sup>. From a Realist perspective, SSC serves as a strategic tool to enhance their influence in global affairs and secure economic benefits<sup>15</sup>. By engaging in trade, investment, and capacity-building programs, India strengthens its position as a leader among developing nations, while Nigeria leverages SSC to solidify its role as a regional power.

Constructivism, however, provides a deeper explanation of SSC's ideological foundation. Both India and Nigeria's commitment to SSC is rooted in their historical experiences with colonialism and their shared identity as post-colonial states. India's outreach to African nations, including Nigeria, is influenced by its long-standing policy of Third World solidarity, while Nigeria's active participation in SSC aligns with its Pan-Africanist diplomatic philosophy<sup>16</sup>. This ideological commitment reinforces their foreign policy choices beyond mere economic pragmatism.

### **Non-Alignment and Strategic Autonomy**

Historically, both nations pursued non-aligned foreign policies, maintaining independence in international affairs<sup>17</sup>. India was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), while Nigeria adopted a similar stance to avoid Cold War entanglements<sup>18</sup>. Realism explains this non-alignment as a strategic move to prevent external interference and maximize their autonomy in a competitive international system. By avoiding direct alliances with superpowers, both countries ensured they could negotiate favorable economic and military arrangements without compromising their sovereignty.

From a Constructivist perspective, non-alignment was also a product of ideological and historical

influences. India's stance was shaped by its anti-colonial struggle and its leaders' vision of an independent foreign policy and similarly, Nigeria's adoption of a non-aligned stance was informed by its Pan-African commitment and its belief in African solidarity<sup>19</sup>. Although both nations appear to have diversified their alliances in recent years, elements of strategic autonomy remain embedded in their foreign policy identities.

### **Economic Diplomacy and Trade Relations**

Economic diplomacy is a priority for both India and Nigeria, with trade and investment serving as key foreign policy instruments<sup>20</sup>. Realism explains this focus on economic diplomacy as a means of securing national economic strength and global influence. India is one of Nigeria's largest trading partners, particularly in the oil sector, reflecting the mutual benefits of economic engagement<sup>21</sup>. Both countries use foreign economic policies to enhance domestic development, secure foreign investments, and maintain strategic partnerships.

Constructivism, however, offers another perspective by emphasizing how historical and identity-driven factors shape economic diplomacy. India's outreach to Nigeria and other African nations is not purely transactional but also influenced by its historical engagement with the continent and its identity as a leader of the Global South. Similarly, Nigeria's economic diplomacy is guided by its Afrocentric vision, promoting intra-African trade and economic partnerships within ECOWAS<sup>22</sup>.

### **Divergences in Foreign Policy:**

#### **Regional vs. Global Focus**

One major divergence in their foreign policy approaches is their scope of engagement. India's foreign policy has a global orientation, engaging with major economies and multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, G20, and BRICS<sup>23</sup>. Nigeria, in contrast, maintains a primarily regional focus, leading initiatives within Africa through ECOWAS and the African Union<sup>24</sup>.

Realism explains this difference through national interest and strategic positioning. India's global focus aligns with its ambition to be a major world power, requiring broader diplomatic engagements.

Nigeria, on the other hand, prioritizes regional leadership, recognizing that its influence is strongest within Africa.

Constructivism, however, highlights the role of identity in shaping these orientations. India's historical identity as a civilizational state and a global advocate for the developing world informs its broader diplomatic engagements. Conversely, Nigeria's foreign policy remains deeply rooted in its Pan-African identity, seeing Africa as the primary arena for its diplomatic leadership.

## Security and Defense Strategies

India has a strong defense policy, engaging in military modernization and strategic partnerships with the United States, Russia, and France<sup>25</sup>. Nigeria, however, prioritizes regional security, focusing on counterterrorism efforts against Boko Haram and peacekeeping missions in West Africa<sup>26</sup>.

Realism explains India's military modernization as a necessary step to counter regional threats, particularly from China and Pakistan. Its alliances with major military powers serve as deterrence mechanisms against potential conflicts. Nigeria's security focus, in contrast, is shaped by immediate threats such as terrorism and regional instability. Its military strategy reflects a pragmatic response to internal and regional security challenges.

Constructivism offers an additional perspective by emphasizing historical and normative influences. India's military strategy is informed by its historical conflicts, particularly with Pakistan and China<sup>2</sup>. Nigeria's security approach, meanwhile, is shaped by its regional responsibilities and its long-standing role as a peacekeeper in African conflicts.

## Multilateral Engagements

Both countries engage in multilateral diplomacy, but India has broader global aspirations, actively participating in forums like BRICS and the Quad<sup>27</sup>. Nigeria, on the other hand, limits its engagement to Africa-focused organizations, reinforcing its role as a continental leader.

Realism explains India's multilateral engagement as a strategy to enhance its global standing. By joining influential organizations, India gains access to economic and political leverage. Nigeria's more limited multilateral focus is a reflection of its national interests, prioritizing African solidarity and leadership within the continent.

Constructivism suggests that historical narratives also influence these choices. India's active engagement with global multilateral institutions is shaped by its identity as a post-colonial power advocating for developing nations. Nigeria's regional focus, in contrast, aligns with its historical leadership in African affairs<sup>28</sup>.

## Challenges

Despite their foreign policy successes, both India and Nigeria face challenges. India's geopolitical tensions with China and border conflicts pose risks to its diplomatic strategies<sup>29</sup>. Nigeria, meanwhile, struggles with internal governance issues that impact its foreign engagements<sup>30</sup>.

From a Realist perspective, these challenges underscore the competitive nature of international politics. India's border disputes with China necessitate strong military preparedness and strategic alliances. Nigeria's internal governance issues weaken its ability to project influence beyond Africa.

Constructivism highlights how these challenges are shaped by historical and social factors. India's tensions with China are rooted in long-standing territorial disputes and historical rivalries. Nigeria's governance challenges, on the other hand, are influenced by colonial legacies and the complexities of its diverse political landscape<sup>31</sup>.

Therefore, India and Nigeria's foreign policy approaches reflect a combination of Realist pragmatism and Constructivist ideologies. While Realism explains their pursuit of strategic interests, Constructivism highlights the historical and identity-driven motivations behind their diplomatic engagements. This dual perspective provides a comprehensive understanding of their



foreign policies and the potential for future collaboration.

## Conclusion

India and Nigeria's foreign policies exhibit both convergence and divergence, reflecting their unique historical backgrounds, geopolitical priorities, and strategic interests. Both nations emphasize economic diplomacy as a core element of their international engagements, leveraging trade, investment, and capacity-building initiatives to advance their national interests. Their commitment to South-South Cooperation (SSC) further underscores their shared vision of strengthening economic and political ties among developing nations, particularly through trade partnerships and multilateral platforms.

However, their foreign policy trajectories diverge in several critical areas. India's global aspirations drive its active participation in major international organizations such as the United Nations, G20, and BRICS, reflecting its ambition to be recognized as a major global power. In contrast, Nigeria's foreign policy remains predominantly Afrocentric, with its diplomatic efforts focused on regional leadership within ECOWAS and the African Union (AU). Additionally, security strategies differ, as India prioritizes military modernization and strategic alliances to address global security challenges, while Nigeria concentrates on counterterrorism and regional peacekeeping efforts.

Despite these differences, both countries wield significant influence in international relations within their respective spheres. Strengthening bilateral cooperation between India and Nigeria could yield mutual benefits, particularly in areas such as economic trade, defense partnerships, and technology transfer. A deeper collaboration would not only enhance their diplomatic standing but also contribute to economic growth and sustainable development. Therefore, leveraging their complementary strengths, India and Nigeria can shape a more balanced and inclusive global order while advancing their national interests.

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